

Dear Chairs Currey and McCrory, Vice Chairs Winfield and Leeper, Ranking Members McCarty and Berthel, and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Riley Elliott and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **S.B. 1095 - An Act Concerning School Resource Officers**. This bill would publicly outline the duties of school resource officers as well as enable school counselors, psychologists, and social workers to serve as School Resource Officers. Connecticut invests heavily in officers who then police schools, and these SROs can promote a culture of hostility, especially against minority students, and breach their codes of conduct. This legislation ensures they have a clearly defined role, which increases accountability and enables options for students to get treatment when they need it.

Students need a culture of care and respect, not violence and punishment. By ensuring School Resource Officers go through training specifically related to social-emotional learning and restorative practices, students can learn in an environment where they feel comfortable. And when something goes wrong, SROs can be held accountable for their actions. In CT, Black students have an arrest rate of 71 per 10,000, four times that of white students, while students with disabilities face arrest rates of 100 per 10,000. CT is in the top ten states for arrest rates for every category except for Pacific Islanders. This unjust treatment by race fosters the school-to-prison pipeline, funneling students into retributive practices rather than giving them the opportunity to get help. Sufficient training, as well as redefining the actors given the duties of SROs, help ensure all students find school to be a safe place. When students face pressing issues in their lives, they are 21 times more likely to visit school-based health centers for treatment than anywhere else. Unfortunately, funding for SROs as separate from counselors and psychologists means that these positions are chronically under-funded. In status quo, 80% of students do not receive treatment for mental health problems because they simply do not have the resources. These problems are especially acute in the low-income, majority-minority districts that Connecticut serves. There are 28 states and DC require training for SROs; however, only Maryland and Utah explicitly include provisions for training that ensure social-emotional awareness— CT can be a leader in this field

In conclusion, I urge you to help our schools fulfill their responsibility to better the students who attend. This is only possible when SROs have a clear, defined role, one which they cannot abuse. I ask you to favorably vote this bill out of the Education Committee so that students can access the support they need.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Riley Elliott  
New Haven, CT